

Charles Bartlett

CIA director needs access

The happy fact, as George Bush prepares to leave the CIA, is that the intelligence agency has come a long way back from the mauled and tattered state to which it was reduced by an overdose of muckraking.

Bush is leaving to insure the CIA will continue to have what he has been able to give it — access to the President. This is crucial to an agency heavily deployed in sensitive areas, and its absence produces the kind of troubles that began when President Johnson began keeping the Director of Central Intelligence at arm's length.

The 11 months of Bush's tenure have produced a number of occasions on which access to the President served the agency well. It was important in balancing the zeal of Justice Department lawyers who tried to lift the veil in areas where disclosure would be damaging. It was useful in modifying the impact of Pentagon leaks to discredit CIA assessments of the Backfire bomber. Most important, access has assisted Bush to assert his authority over 100,000 members of the intelligence community.

The prospect of installing a new CIA Director at the outset of Jimmy Carter's term, along with the heads of the political departments, will upset some who complained last winter that Bush's appointment was too political. The fear then was

that he would be excessively responsive to the President.

Some suggested that the director should be an intelligence professional who possessed the political detachment of a Supreme Court justice. The Church Committee was even proposing a nine-year term for the director. In this spirit, Congress voted a ten-year term to the FBI director in October and Clarence Kelley is described as inclined to serve it out.

Kelley's obduracy will pose a dilemma for Carter, who said many unkind things about him in the campaign. It will certainly not produce a close working relationship, the collaborative spirit which serves to avert the misuse to which the CIA and FBI were subjected by Presidents Johnson and Nixon. The tenure of the director is a handicap to the agency when it produces a standoff with the White House.

The Rockefeller and Murphy Commissions both urged that the CIA director be a man of stature and independence, primarily so he can knock on doors. Dealing with an extremely constructive select committee under Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, Bush has built a climate of cordial rapport with Congress. He may even have set the stage for further reform in the creation of a Joint Committee on Intelligence.

In a solid new book called *Secrets, Spies, and*

Scholars, Ray Cline, who served for many years in the top circles of the intelligence community, writes: "CIA morale has improved; congressional and public confidence has increased. The structure of the U.S. Central Intelligence system as it is now is as sound as it has ever been."

This is confirmed by officials within the agency and senators who concur in high estimates of the job Bush has done. He has been operating skillfully at the top political levels, but his political background has made him doubly careful to keep his dealings from being tainted by politics. He has taken great pains to perform as a professional.

The record causes some to say that Carter would be smart to keep Bush on. John Kennedy's first act as President-elect was to urge Allen Dulles to remain as CIA Director because he felt "a continuity of stability" was imperative. The new review procedures insure against the risk of inheriting covert headaches like the Bay of Pigs. The CIA remains controversial among liberals and the selection of a successor may stir dissension.

But beneath his professionalism, Bush is a Texas Republican whose zeal for his job would be sorely tested by a necessity to deal with a distant and wary President. It will be better for all parties, most importantly for the CIA, for Carter to name his own man.